

Education for Politics

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IN A DEMOCRACY, education is in politics and in politics to stay; in a democracy everything of final moment, at least so far as this world is concerned, is in politics, and in politics to stay: indeed that is almost exactly what democracy is. This does not mean that we must keep on electing state superintendents of instruction on a ballot split up into party columns: it does mean that education is everybody's business, and everybody's most important business; that education is the supreme concern of the city, the town and the country, of the county, the state and the nation, and that state and nation must take definite and full responsibility for it.

What caused the recent world war is still the main problem for any mind that wants to think below the crude surface of human affairs. Germany undoubtedly applied the torch, but who loaded the magazine with explosives to wreck a world and create havoc for ten generations to repair? For four hundred years Prussians, under the lead of the Hohenzollerns, thought the Prussia that was to be: then Prussia, still under the same sinister guidance, thought the Germany that was to be: then they began to think the Germanized world that was to be. At every point the image was thrust into reality by energy, intelligence, tireless action, unwavering persistence: nothing was too huge to be resolved and done; nothing was too small to be attended to; no one was too high or too lowly to be conscripted, from Hohenzollern to baby in the cradle.

Europe furnished all the necessary environment conditions. Religio-political rivalries and hatred put on the Thirty Years War to give fighting Prussia her first chances and to sink deep into the soul of middle Europe the agonies that train for greatness; Austria's weakness and England's and France's greed set the stage for a Frederick the Great; Napoleon burned into Germany's heart the horror of being the victim in war and the resolve henceforth to be invincible and the aggressor; and finally the stifling competition of modern trade raised the pressure to the explosive point; then the war.

And all of this time, what of schools and teachers and education? Go back fifty years before the American Revolution, and you find in all Europe, perhaps in all the world, one king and only one, busied with schools, school children, teachers—old Frederick William of Prussia; he had two hobbies: his army, with its giant Potsdam guards, six and seven foot men, kidnapped from everywhere; and the Prussian state schools, two hundred years before their time. Old crabbed, crotchety Frederick William carved his initials on the army and the school, and like letters cut in the bark

of a tree, the Hohenzollern brand grew unobliterated into the hugeness of greater Prussia and the prussianized German Empire. American educators in the nineteenth and twentieth century, visiting the German schools, dimly perceived but little understood the shadow of the old monarch still covering the wonderful educational machine, like the shadow of the fabled Upas tree. "Listen to me, so that you can tell me back what I am telling you," shouted a German teacher to his cringing boys; and old Frederick William if he could have waked and heard would have pinned a medal on that teacher.

German schools did not educate: they trained. Education engenders freedom: it cultivates the power and habit of thinking on all questions and thinking to the end; it fosters the ambition to plan and execute one's own career and participate freely in the common life of man. Only a democracy dare educate: and even democracies are yet far short of the courage of their convictions.

An astounding yet almost unnoticed educational fact: the Prussian minister of education in 1841 banned the kindergarten from the kingdom! This is the very devil's hoof of autocracy betraying itself in the most unexpected place: why ban the kindergarten? Was it not a German institution with an incurably German name, which almost defies translation? Did it not confine its efforts to babies under school age? Was it not the dream of a harmless, innocent pious enthusiast? What was its crime, that the mighty engine of the Prussian government was turned against it, that the royal "cultusminister" should abolish it from its native soil? Yet the minister was absolutely correct, for the kindergarten in all its childlike innocence contained an antidote for Hohenzollernism; His Excellency probably would have called it poison. **That element was freedom:** the kindergarten, by its very name, was a place for children to grow according to their spiritual nature; the only school Prussia could tolerate was one in which children were trained on the Prussian model, which was vastly different from the spirit of the kindergarten, or the Sermon on the Mount either.

In brief, Prussia was educating, or at least schooling, for politics. And America must educate for politics: but, in God's name, how differently! The supreme question is **How?** To this great momentous question, big with fate, we can not guess nor fake an answer; the answer must be thought out and worked out; and for this task the best brains of America are none too good. How shall American schools educate Americans for American politics? Surely not as Prussia trained Germans for Prussian politics! But how? This is the ulti-

mate key to our whole system and operation. If we fail in this, then success in the rest will be of less than no avail, for it will render our ultimate downfall only the more tragic—as in the downfall of Germany.

First, we must sense the fact that this question is paramount, and that its answer will be decisive for all the rest. The Prussian minister in 1841 was absolutely correct and efficient in abolishing the kindergarten, just as the Prussian school master in 1904 was right in shouting to his boys "Listen to me, so that you can tell me back what I am telling you." For the kindergarten was contrived to produce exactly what the Prussian system did not want and could not tolerate; and the German teacher was the tool of the German state for producing minds that would say back whatever the government told them. Without this teacher, omnipresent for three centuries, August, 1914, could not have been what it was, for the Prussian autocracy and the Prussian army could not have been what they were. So without a vastly different school system and teacher, America could not be what she is, and still less can she attain to what she is to be: for great though our past may be, who can doubt that our future is to be greater, more beautiful, more human, more truly American. The Declaration of Independence announced to the world the most ambitious and idealistic political plan ever drawn: we have only begun to build the actual structure: the task of the American school is to breed up the human elements which shall enter into the creation of the true American.

A beginning has been made in the schools as well as in the government: In 1870, when England was first putting her hand to public elementary schools the scientist Huxley proposed "an educational ladder, with its foot in the gutter and its top in the university, up which any boy might climb as far as his capacity and his ambition should lead him." The public school system of the United States was the first approximation the world ever saw of this dream of Huxley's. That school system, reaching from primary grades to state universities, is the most democratic going concern in the world today—this in spite of whatever faults and weaknesses it may suffer from. It is significant that when the homeland of the kindergarten banned it, America took it up; and we must have eagerly carried its gracious influence upward in our schools, so that the primary grades of our schools today have outstripped the rest of the system in their spiritual efficiency.

Education is the discovery and fostering of the truest character of the growing individual. So the educator of a nation has to divine and foster the deepest essence and nature of the people. What is America? This is the supreme question for every sincere and earnest teacher. Without some true and adequate realization of this great idea, no